CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Why Study Washington's Aviation System?

Airports function as both valuable transportation assets and economic engines. They are crucial on a local, statewide, and national level to move people and goods, promote business and commerce and contribute to our quality of life. Airports also provide access for critical services such as emergency medical, search and rescue, firefighting, and disaster management activities that other transportation modes could not adequately accommodate. The fact that Washington's airports are an essential component of Washington's overall transportation system has been clearly emphasized in the Governor's strategic economic plan and the
Washington State Legislature's 2005 call for this Long-Term Air Transportation Study (LATS).

This Phase I technical report details the current capacity and overall conditions of the state's airports. It serves as the first step towards developing a comprehensive improvement strategy for Washington's aviation system. LATS will help the governor and state legislature to make decisions and target investments that effectively serve the future air transportation needs of Washington.

What is the State's Interest in Aviation?

In 1996, the Washington State Transportation Commission convened a group of aviation stakeholders as the Aviation Policy Advisory Committee to identify aviation issues, and to make recommendations to the Transportation Commission on an appropriate, expanded state role in aviation. The group defined the following as the state's interest in aviation:

Preservation: It is the state's interest that aviation facilities and services be preserved to provide access for all regions of the state to the nation's air transportation system, provide for emergency management, and support local economies.

Safety: It is the state's interest that transportation by air be safe.

Capacity: It is the state's interest that there be sufficient airport capacity to respond to growth in demand and ensure access across the state, the nation and the world.

Environmental Protection: It is the state's interest that negative environmental impacts of airports on people and the natural environment be mitigated.

What are the Issues?

Over 17 million scheduled passengers enplane at a Washington airport, 3.7 million aircraft land or depart and more than 860,000 tons of air cargo flow through the state's airports each year. More and more pilots continue to depend on the state's public use airports for transportation, recreation and emergency uses.

Washington's aviation system is highly dynamic, but in spite of its importance to the state's economy, the combined forces of benign neglect, inconsistent levels of activity, an antiquated funding base, a fluctuating economy and local land use conflicts interact to threaten its very existence.

Several factors underscore the urgency for long range aviation planning in Washington:

- At a state level, significant population growth is expected. Washington population has doubled in the last 30 years, and an additional two million are expected by 2025. Significant growth is also expected in four regions of the state:
    - Spokane Area: 200,000 increase
    - Tri-Cities Area: 100,000 increase
    - Puget Sound: 1 million increase
    - SW Washington: 400,000 increase

- Historically, increases in population result in increased aviation activity for business, freight, emergency access, public safety and recreation.

- FAA predicts significant increases within the state including a 25 percent increase in total aviation activity and a 42 percent increase in commercial operations by 2025.

- FAA predicts significant changes will include commercial service activity transitioning to smaller next generation aircraft. Growth in general aviation is predicted to increase, with business and corporate flying anticipated to grow by 60 percent in 2030. FAA forecasts the

fleet of very light jets and next generation technology aircraft to increase nationwide by 400 to 500 each year through 2017.

- In spite of this high level of growth, and a growing need for capacity, aviation funding remains in question due to unstable fuel prices and proposed federal funding cuts. The ever decreasing resources for airports continue to demand a focused, planned decision making process.

With significant change expected in coming years, the state must be prepared to face the challenge of maintaining and improving our aviation system for the future. Washington needs a coherent statewide strategy to ensure that adequate aviation capacity exists to accommodate predicted growth.

In recognition of this need, the Washington State Legislature initiated in 2005 the Long-Term Air Transportation Study (LATS). Armed with the solid information generated by LATS, both Washington State and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) will be better equipped to make more cost effective decisions about airport development proposals. The study will also be helpful for future, more detailed master planning, and environmental analyses or site selection studies that might be conducted if proposals emerge for new or expanded airport facilities.

A Phased Study

This report presents the first of a three-phase of LATS. Each phase answers one of the three basic questions fundamental to the development of a systemwide approach to managing Washington's aviation resource:

- **Phase I – What do we have?** – This phase inventories statewide airport facilities and capacity and assessment of existing conditions.
- **Phase II – What do we need?** – Phase II will provide a market forecast of statewide airport capacity and facilities. It will also include an analysis of air cargo and integrate the findings of Washington's high-speed passenger rail study.

- **Phase III – How will we get there?** – During this policy development phase, the Governor's Airport Planning Council appointed by the Governor will consider the LATS findings and public input to make recommendations on how to best meet the state's long term commercial and general aviation needs.

LATS will address capacity needs for the overall system, but does not include more detailed efforts of an airport master plan, environmental assessment, or site selection for new airport facilities. Those decisions require much more detailed analysis and information and would be performed as part of a separate effort with extensive involvement from local jurisdictions and the public.

Figure 1: LATS Study Phases

PHASE I	WHAT WE HAVE	Airport inventory, capacity and airspace assessment.	To be completed by September 30, 2006
PHASE II	WHAT WE NEED	25 year activity forecast (139 airports), market analyses at commercial service airports, air cargo forecast, high speed passenger rail assessment; future capacity analysis, summarize system requirement.	To be completed by July 2007
PHASE III	HOW WE MEET THE NEEDS	The Governor's Airport Planning Council to provide recommendations for future airport strategy and investment statewide.	To be completed by July 2009

Building on Previous Efforts

LATS draws from regional and statewide airport studies and other resources dating back to the late 1980's. These include:

- AIRTRAC (1990) Air Transportation Commission created to strategically integrate air and surface transportation
- PSRC Flight Plan (1992) to Build 3rd runway at Sea-Tac and develop major supplemental airports – Paine Field eliminated as preferred alternative
- Washington Transportation Commission – Resolution 477 (1993)
- Aviation Goals and Policy Plan (1998)

- State wide Airport Economic Impact Study (2001)
- Rural Airport Study (2002)
- Pavement Condition Assessment (2006 Final Draft)
- Airport Layout Plans (2005-2007) are now required for WSDOT Airport Aid Grant Program eligibility. More than 30 will be completed by 2007

What Does the State Aviation System Look Like?

LATS addresses 140 airports that were open for public use in 2005. Of these, nearly half (66) are deemed significant to the national airport system. These airports of significance are planned for and integrated into the FAA's National Plan of Integrated Airports (NPIAS) every two years. Evergreen Field, located in Clark County, is listed, although it closed in July 2006. Lester State, located in King County, is also listed, although it is closed to fixed wing aircraft traffic since flooding destroyed the runway.

The state airport map included on Page 5 shows how the public use airports are distributed across the state.

What Specifically is Addressed in LATS Phase I?

The Phase I assessment includes a statewide analysis of existing airport facilities, and commercial passenger, air cargo and general aviation transportation capacity. This phase addresses existing conditions only – forecasting will be performed as part of the Phase II analysis. The Phase I report provides a snapshot of current airport facilities in Washington State.

The results summarize statewide airport facilities and services information and measure current airport system capacity. The Phase I report also introduces state airport classifications that help define the role of each airport in meeting air transportation needs and how it functions as part of the statewide system.

What you will find in this report:

- **Approach:** This section presents the study objectives set by the two funding partners – the Washington State Legislature and Federal Aviation Administration – and identifies the audiences and geographies addressed in the report.

- **Methodology:** This section describes the techniques used to design the study, communicate with the public, and collect data.

- **Assessment:** Findings in this section describe existing facilities and services available at Washington's airports and assess existing airport capacity. The system assessment is organized in three sections, including statewide analysis, Special Emphasis Regions and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO).

- **Next Steps:** This section describes upcoming system plan work to be conducted during Phase II and Phase III.

- **Summary of Findings:** Highlights the major findings of Phase I.